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**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Job Corps, and  
WO Staff

Reducing hazardous fuel on federal lands plays a vital role in achieving the goals of the President's *Healthy Forests Initiative*, the *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy*, and the *National Fire Plan*. Reducing risk to our firefighters, communities, municipal watersheds and restoring the health of our forests and rangelands are the central themes of these initiatives. Of the three factors that most influence wildland fire behavior - weather, topography, and fuel - land managers can effectively impact only fuel.

Forest Service employees responsible for the fuel treatment program have made significant and noteworthy progress. In FY 2002, over 1.2 million acres of hazardous fuel reduction were accomplished. These results are impressive given the extensive drought conditions across the country and the severity of the past fire season. This work was done at the same time planning occurred for treating approximately 1.35 million acres in FY 2003.

Equally impressive are changes that you have made to the way we plan and conduct our fuel treatment program. These changes include:

- Accelerating project selection
- Increasing collaboration among the federal agencies and with our many state, tribal, and local partners
- Planning across administrative boundaries
- Establishing a goal to contract at least 50 percent of hazardous fuel reduction activities
- Committing to a more systematic approach to project selection.

To address the magnitude of problems in forests and rangelands requires setting clear priorities and future direction for the fuel treatment program. This past summer provided vivid evidence of the consequences of fuel buildup coupled with the spread of insect, disease, and invasive plant infestations, compounded by severe drought. Colorado, Arizona, and Oregon recorded their largest fires in the last century. Moreover, problems linger long after the last ember is out. Soil and wind erosion, water quality degradation, and loss of fish and wildlife habitat will plague many areas for years to come. Although we are now treating in excess of one million acres, we must accelerate our efforts to ensure that we are targeting the right acres.

Our goals are to eliminate loss of life, reduce firefighter injuries, and lessen damage to communities and the environment from severe, unplanned, and unwanted fires.

Attachment 2-1



The following National Fuel Treatment Priorities will apply to all projects:

- Consistent with Goals Two and Three of the *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan*, and corresponding performance measures, funding will be targeted on a priority basis to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and areas in condition classes 2 or 3 in fire regimes I, II, or III with highest risk reduction potential, consistent with Congressional appropriation direction and the President's Budget.
- WUI projects should give priority to communities at greatest risk of fire and where communities are contributing community and private dollars, as well as volunteer efforts to reduce catastrophic fire risks.
- Consistent with Goal Four of the *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan* and the corresponding performance measure, priority will be given to mechanical treatments that will produce by-products (small diameter trees, biomass, etc.) that can be utilized. Mechanical treatments should be conducted where on-site conditions are conducive to their use and land-use policies do not conflict. Forestry experts report that many of the acres most in need of thinning require mechanical work before prescribed fire can be conducted.
- Prescribed burning will be used when weather and resource conditions permit, where mechanical treatments are not appropriate, and as maintenance treatments following mechanical work.
- Contracted fuel treatment work will receive preference over work performed by the federal workforce. By FY 2005, our goal is to contract 50 percent of the funding approved for mechanical treatments and 20 percent of the funding approved for prescribed burns. Wherever possible, projects should use third-party contracting that supports rural community stability.
- Consistent with Goal Four of the *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan*, projects with overall risk reduction goals that result from partnerships and other collaborative efforts will receive preference. Efforts should continue toward obtaining economic use of the treated area by-products to help meet wood fiber and energy needs and to enhance community stability.
- Wherever possible, mechanical treatments that produce biomass should emphasize biomass utilization for energy and other worthwhile purposes.

In addition to treating the right acres in the right sequence across the landscape, we must continue the collaborative relationships that have guided 2003 project selections. We must continue to expand our circle of involvement in the planning stages of fuel treatment projects. Stakeholders should be engaged early in the planning process to assist us in defining the fuel problem, finding innovative solutions and identifying post-treatment objectives.

To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of fuel treatment projects, we must also complete the selection of fuel treatment projects much earlier than in the past. Starting immediately, and each year thereafter, by May 1 each Region must ensure that fuel treatment project data for each Forest, and the Region as a whole, is entered into NFPORS and reflects the program planned for the next Fiscal Year. Base the program level on current year funding.

I am confident that our line managers, resource and fuel specialists, and support personnel will continue to work together to achieve the goals of the President's *Healthy Forests Initiative, 10-Year Implementation Plan* and the *National Fire Plan*. Again, thank you for your professional dedication and your continued commitment to healthy forests and rangelands.

/s/ Sally Collins (for)  
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Chief